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ABSTRACT

A variety of local resources are available to language teachers to enhance their classroom activities and provide inservice training opportunities for themselves. Examples include: local colleges that may allow teachers to sit in on classes, provide an instructor to speak to a secondary language class, or offer a speakers bureau service; professional meetings through which a teacher can find pen pals for students or set up materials exchanges; commercial resources such as markets or catalog services offering ethnic foods and supplies; the teacher's own experiences, periodicals, or local organizations that might lend themselves to exchange opportunities or class activities. (MSE)

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REACH OUT AND TOUCH SOME ONE: USING COMMUNITY RESOURCES

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Local resources are often ignored by many of us, and yet they can definitely help to keep a language relevant for today's students.

Since its founding, Brooklyn, Ohio, a suburb of Cleveland, has consisted of a large German-Russian population. German is often spoken in the home, and many students play soccer and dance for local and national language organizations. This immediate contact with the language and culture has been utilized by my colleagues in the German classroom through several activities. Parents, grandparents and retired volunteers have been used as teacher aides in all levels of German to aid in reading practice and oral conversation skills. Advanced level students must record an interview in German with a person from the community, preferably a non-family member. Free films from the local German embassy offer students an updated and current analysis of various historical and cultural events in both East and West Germany.

My first contact with local Spanish resources began by following up on a photograph published in the newspaper (the Cleveland Plain Dealer) about a Spanish teen dance troupe. I used the telephone directory to locate the Spanish-American Committee, a source that since has proven invaluable to me and my students. Their dance group, for example, has performed at our International Fair.

As an in-service project, both Spanish teachers visited the committee's language school where we saw adults of various ethnic backgrounds learning English as well as receiving technical on-the-job-training. Most importantly, I discovered the Spanish-American Day Care Center, which has become the focus of Christmas and Easter projects in the advanced level classes.

At Christmastime my students design and make their own piñatas as well as individual favors for all the forty to sixty students there. Several days prior to our Christmas break, the students and I, dressed as Santa Claus and his elves, visit the children to break the piñata, sing songs in Spanish, and, of course, visit with Santa. Most of my students are overwhelmed to see a three- or four-year-old speaking Spanish fluently, yet with those children to whom English is a foreign language, our students lose the inhibition so often present in the formal classroom and begin to speak and to try out their Spanish freely. We have also presented a fairy tale in Spanish at Easter and brought the children the Easter bunny. In return the children have made for us special favors of their own or presented a dance or song typical of their culture, which could be Puerto Rican, Cuban, or Mexican.

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Not everyone who studies to become a foreign language teacher knows how to perform a dance or play an instrument of that country. When my students expressed an interest in learning an authentic Mexican or Spanish dance, I panicked, but, remembering that "your fingers do the walking through the yellow pages," I consulted the directory for dance studios. After calling several that specifically indicated Latin dancing, I called our only dance studio in Brooklyn. To my surprise one of the instructors was from Mexico. She found and taped the music to "El Jarabe Mexicano" and visited us during two actual class meetings (with her two-year-old son) and several times after school to practice. Besides the dance lessons, Lupita shared with the class some advice about an upcoming trip to Mexico. I might add that she spoke to her son in Spanish, which provided another insight into the language that my students had not experienced before.

What kinds of local resources are available to you?

1. Local colleges. Sit in on a class or get an instructor of a local college to come out and talk to a class. Findlay College, for example, offers a free speaker service on careers in foreign languages.

2. Professional meetings. Exchange names with another teacher and set up pen pals with each other's students. You can also set up exchanges of materials between schools. This can also be done with personal acquaintances.

3. Commercial resources. Give your community and nearby communities a closer look. We have a Zayre's store nearby in the Denison/West 65th area that always has greeting cards in Spanish. We also have a Fazio's food store that specializes in Spanish foods. A food store in Port Clinton sells flour/harina to make tortillas. Have you visited the Columbus area and the Continent shopping area near Worthington? My teaching colleague bought a tortilla maker there. Catalogs such as those from Hanover House or Lillian Vernon offer baking items for French and Spanish cuisine.

4. Your own experiences. Since my son is adopted, I discovered an orphanage in an adoption magazine to which I subscribe that needed baby quilts to be made. The article provided directions for the quilts, and my students and I made two as a class and Spanish Club project. We later received a personal thank-you note for them.

By following through on leads seen in national and local periodicals, and by examining the world around you, we can all reach out and help our students discover how small the world truly is and subsequently reveal to them the why of taking a foreign language.